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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000491

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: GOI DEMOLISHES WEST BANK RESIDENCES, DISPLACING 25

REF: 07 JERUSALEM 1859

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. Israeli authorities demolished four structures on March 18, three of them residential, displacing 25 Palestinians in the village of al-'Azariya in the West Bank, just outside Jerusalem. One house was on the Palestinian side of the barrier, in a built-up area of al-'Azariya. The remaining three bedouin structures were on a disputed hill in El on the Ma'ale Adumim side of the barrier. Separately, COGAT officers were observed giving verbal warnings to residents of Tal al-Khashaba, southeast of Nablus, reiterating orders issued on March 4 for five demolitions to take place on or after March 26. End summary.

Four West Bank Structures Demolished;
Palestinians Say One House Was In Area B

12. (C) Israeli authorities demolished a total of four structures on March 18, three of them residential, displacing 25 Palestinians in the village of al-'Azariya. Al-'Azariya mayor Issam Farun told PolSpec on March 18 that one of the demolished houses was located on the Palestinian side of the separation barrier in area B, under Palestinian civil control, and had been built more than three years prior with a PA-issued permit. Farun said the family had received a demolition order two years ago and had unsuccessfully tried to appeal the decision. Farun said the house was demolished because it is too close to the planned route of the barrier. UN contacts said the demolished house was a concrete structure with two adult residents and four children.

13. (C) UN contacts assessed that the structures were probably in area C, and attributed the discrepancy to different PA and Israeli interpretations of the boundaries. James Weatherhill, a Humanitarian Affairs Officer with the UN Office for the Coordinator of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), told Poloff on March 19 that the house was "clearly on the edge" of areas B and C. "It's always the same story," he said. In OCHA's experience, people on the outskirts of area B have frequently found themselves with demolition orders indicating their houses are in area C. Weatherhill said the GOI and PA frequently differ in their boundary determinations, which he said are derived from hand-drawn lines on Oslo-era maps, making the thickness of the line a source of error. OCHA, which uses a map set with boundaries similar to those used by the PA, has requested the high resolution copies of the Israeli map set from COGAT and been refused. Weatherhill suggested the USG request the maps directly from the GOI. He estimated that the areas subject to interpretation are as wide as 100 meters across, and said cases such as the one in al-'Azariya are increasingly common

as Palestinian villages in area B grow closer to the boundaries set during the Oslo process.

Additional Displacement of Bedouin in E1

14. (C) The other three demolished structures were part of a bedouin encampment in the Ras al-'Ayazra neighborhood of al-'Azariya. Ras al-'Ayazra is a disputed hill between Ma'ale Adumim and al-'Azariya (reftel); the route of the separation barrier includes this hill within the Ma'ale Adumim settlement bloc. According to UN contacts, one dwelling housed three adults and seven children under 18 years old, while a second dwelling housed five adults and four children. A third structure was used as a chicken coop. Ten of the 19 displaced persons are UNRWA-registered refugees, and the structures were located within the E1 area between Ma'ale Adumim and Jerusalem, according to UNRWA. Israeli authorities previously demolished bedouin structures in E1 this year on February 3 and February 16.

Other Area C Demolition Orders Issued

15. (C) Separately, COGAT officers were observed by Poloff on the afternoon of March 18 giving verbal warnings to residents of Tal al-Khashaba, southeast of Nablus, reiterating orders issued on March 4 for five demolitions to take place on or after March 26. The site, also known locally as Khirbet al-Twayil, is in area C, but receives administrative services from the area B village of Aqraba. Mayor Jawdat Bani-Jaber gave Poloff a tour of the area, including five structures

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with demolition orders issued March 4, and 14 structures with orders dating to January 2008. Four sheet metal shacks and one well built within the past year are interspersed with caves and stone huts reportedly over 100 years old. (Pictures of Tal al-Khashaba are available on the Consulate General's classified website by following the "Political Reporting Attachments" link at <http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/jerusalem/ind ex.cfm>). Poloff witnessed at least four unmarked white SUVs driving between sites in Tal al-Khashaba. Local residents said the occupants identified themselves as officers from COGAT, and reiterated the need for residents to leave the area. The demolition orders are reportedly based on the lack of building permits, which are not available in the area due to the lack of a master plan. One Palestinian resident said a nearby winter dwelling for his family had been demolished three times in recent years, but that his family has nowhere else to graze its livestock.

16. (C) Bani-Jaber, an elected Fatah mayor leading the Aqraba municipality with a 6-5 Fatah-Hamas split on its council, told Poloff he had gone to great lengths to provide services to the remote area southeast of Aqraba's urban center. The municipality built a small school, mosque, and electrical lines in an effort to support the subsistence grazing and agriculture relied upon by area families. The mosque and elements of the electrification project received demolition orders in January, 2008. The municipality is also funding legal costs for permit applications and court fees for the villagers. Issam Abu al-Haj, director of the Jerusalem Legal Aid Center (JLAC), said JLAC had exhausted administrative appeals before COGAT for the 14 structures ordered demolished in January 2008, and had submitted an appeal for those structures to the Israeli High Court of Justice. Regarding the five structures ordered demolished on March 4, JLAC has begun the administrative appeals process, and, according to Abu al-Haj, has received assurances from COGAT that the structures will not be demolished during the appeals process. He assessed that demolition is not imminent, but that the appeals process before COGAT is certain to fail, and that these structures will also eventually be litigated before the High Court. Abu al-Haj said JLAC has encouraged the village

to begin the process of submitting a master plan for the area, as JLAC is doing in three other villages. All of those submissions are being processed, he said, and none have been approved to date.

¶7. (SBU) UN OCHA reports a total of 25 structural demolitions in area C, including nine residential, since the beginning of 2009. Fifty-six people have been displaced, including 35 children.

Comment

¶8. (C) Demolitions by the GOI area C continue, notwithstanding Israeli obligations in the Roadmap and commitments by DefMin Barak to Secretary Rice in March 2008 and to Tony Blair in May 2008 not to demolish homes in area C.

WALLES